

The Jagiellonian University Centre for the Study on the History and Culture of Krakow Jews

Together with the development of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University and the increasing interest in the legacy of local Jewish communities, the need has increased for a concentration on research and education in the field of Jewish local history itself. The first traces of a Jewish presence in what is now the Cracow district are noted already in the 10th century by the merchant, traveller and chronicler Ibrahim ibn Jakub; while subsequent references in 14th century documents talk of the functioning of not only a Jewish community but also the existence of a Jewish street within the city limits. Therefore the history of Cracow's Jews as a functioning society is one reaching back at least 700 years, and over one thousand years in terms of an actual presence. For centuries Cracow and the adjacent town of Kazimierz, later incorporated into the city as a district, were to become one of the most important concentrations of Ashkenazi Jews in Europe. They were also to become, particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries, centres of religious study. The nineteenth and twentieth century constituted an unprecedented development of Jewish society and its remarkable influence on the functioning of the city. Jews constituted 25% of the city's inhabitants during the inter-war period (around 65,000). Even after the Holocaust, Jewish life did not disappear from the city and today a small but important Jewish community still functions.

In 2009 the Centre for the Study on the History and Culture of Krakow Jews was created, at the request of a group of staff from the Department of Jewish Studies (from 2012 the Institute of Jewish Studies) and on the resolution of the rector of the Jagiellonian University. The Centre officially started to function as a unit of the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of History on the 1st of October 2009.

The opening of the Centre within the structure of the Faculty of History was no chance occurrence for its units had earlier had a significant input into

research into Jews in Cracow. Many MA, Ph.D. and post-doctoral theses had been written in these units on the history of Jews in Cracow, as well as on Cracow Jews in Israel and countries of the Diaspora. The team of students and staff of the popular Jewish Studies were of particular note in this area.

Inauguration

The official inauguration of the Centre took place on the 17th of November 2009 in the auditorium at Collegium Novum. The event was attended by the initiators of the undertaking and numerous important guests representing Cracow academic and research centres as well as Jewish institutions in Cracow.

After the official welcome given by Dr. Edyta Gawron, the Centre's head, those assembled took the floor. Professor Andrzej Banach, the dean of the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of History in the name of the rector and his own, expressed his delight at the creation of a new university unit. Professor Edward Dąbrowa, the head of the Centre's Programme Council and at the same time the head of the then Department of Jewish Studies talked about the idea for the new institution and the preparations for the inauguration.

There was no absence of representatives from Cracow's Jewish community during the inauguration. Rabbi Boaz Pash, then the Chief Rabbi of Cracow, in his address drew attention to the Yeshiva and rabbis combining Talmud studies with a secular education. Let the following fragment from the rabbi's speech serve as an illustration of the need for a continuation of research into the history of Jews in Cracow:

[...] The greatest, the best known and the most influential rabbi on the endless list of Cracow rabbis is , as everyone knows, Remu, Rabbi Moshe Isserles. Remu – a learned man, cabbalist, and rabbinic authority, who was also a philosopher and learned in many secular subjects. He supported and motivated the pupils of the Yeshiva to broaden their general knowledge beyond the traditionally studied Talmud and Halakha of the Yeshiva. Obviously not during the Yeshiva itself but, for example, on the Sabbath, in the afternoon or during holidays.

For that reason only from Remu's school could figures such as Rabbi Dawid Ganz – the historian, astronomer, geographer and mathematician – be produced. He is considered to be a 'pioneer,' the first rabbi-historian, whose greatest work is the book *Cemach Dawid*. This is comprised of two parts: the first talks of the history of Jews, the second about local history. To a certain degree the Centre for Studies into the History and Culture of Jews in Cracow is his modern successor: Rabbi Dawid Ganz documented the history of Jews from the creation of the world to the mid 16th century, and you have to do the rest.

Remu explained the Torah dictate – 'Zchor Jemot Olam...': 'Remember past days, reflect on bygone years from generation to generation; ask your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will tell you.' He explained that dictate as the obligation to study humanity's chronicles in general and those of Israel's in particular.

I personally do not remember a single *Teshuvah*, or any Halakha reply over the course of five hundred years in which the opinions of Remu have not appeared (and if not Remu then their author was BaCH [rabbi Joel Sirkes, 1565–1641], Tosafot Jom Tow [Yom-Tov Lipmann ben Nathan ha-Levi Heller, 1578–1654; the author of a commentary to Miszna Tosafot Yom-Tov] or some other Cracow rabbi). They still are alive, still speak and their story continues onwards [...].

Cracow Jewish circles were also represented by Tadeusz Jakubowicz, the head of the Jewish Community Board in Cracow, who congratulated the Jagiellonian University on the creation of such a unique institution. Lili Haber, head of the Association of Cracovians in Israel was symbolically present throughout the proceedings thanks to her letter sent and read out, in which she referred to the mission and location of the Centre:

[...] As an Israeli who was born in Cracow I have in my genes the great heritage of these treasures of culture. For almost seven centuries this city was the centre of Jewish life in Europe, some of the most eminent rabbis and teachers lived and worked here. My ancestors, Cracow Jews, lived, worked and helped in the building of success and a powerful state, thanks to the invitation of Polish kings. Expelled from England, Portugal and Spain it was right here that they were to find peace and prosperity. It was here that Jews created both a religious and a secular culture[!]. The language they used – Yiddish, was born here and it was more than a language for it is culture itself and therefore more Jewish than Hebrew.

The Centre's aim and mission is to research and document that fabulous history. And could there possibly be a better place than a new premises in Kazimierz, in the very heart of the Jewish district where every single stone has its story to tell? [...].

The ceremonial opening was finalised by a presentation of the Centre's aims and plans given by Dr. E. Gawron and an inaugural lecture by Dr. hab. Michał Galas *Studia żydowskie w Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim a rozwój badań nad historią Żydów krakowskich* [Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University and the development of research into the history of Cracow Jews].

The founding and inauguration of the Centre's work did not pass without comment on the part of the local media (TVP Kraków, PAP, the local Cracow press, Internet news services) as well as enjoying foreign coverage (*Nowiny Krakowskie* – a Hebrew-language monthly published in Israel).

Mission

Several elements lay at the core of the idea to create the Centre, including the seriously fragmentary nature of the research being conducted, its unevenness and the large number of issues hitherto unresearched. The existence of the foresaid resulted in a need to prioritise research tasks as well as to create

a team able to undertake and realise this research. Of real importance was also the wealth of sources in various languages, sources kept in archives and libraries, though also in private collections in Poland and abroad. The editing of these sources and their inclusion within academic circulation was to become one of the Centre's many callings.

The basic tasks for the Centre from its inception were: the conducting of research projects on individual Cracow Jews and Jewish institutions in Cracow; the publication of studies, thematic monographs and source materials; the organisation of academic conferences devoted to the history of Cracow Jews, as well as cooperation in their organisation; the conducting of academic classes and seminars on the history of Jews in Cracow – lectures and seminars in Polish and foreign languages; the organisation of non-specialist cyclical lectures for the general public on the history of Cracow Jews; the promotion of research into the history of Cracow Jews in Poland and abroad; the assembling of materials and publications on Cracow Jews; cooperation with Cracow, national and international institutions in the preservation and promotion of the heritage of Cracow's Jews; cooperation with other organisations on various projects, educational programmes and historical/academic consultations; work on the creation of a museum of the history and culture of Cracow Jews.

From the very start of its activities the Centre has been supported by the Policy Council, composed of members of staff from the Department of Jewish Studies at present the Institute and representatives of other units at the Faculty of History. The Council's duties involve approving the basic directions for an academic institution, the approval of research and education projects as well as passing judgement on any organisational changes within the Centre. From the beginning the composition of the Centre's Policy Council has been: Prof. E. Dąbrowa (head of the Department, and subsequently the Institute of Jewish Studies), chair of the Policy Council; Dr hab. M. Galas (the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Jewish Studies (IJ UJ)), Dr hab. Adam Kaźmierczyk (IJ UJ), Dr hab. Leszek Hońdo (IJ UJ), Dr hab. Jan Święch, a professor of the University (dean of the Faculty of History, the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology), Prof. Czesław Brzoza (Institute of History UJ), Prof. Wojciech Bałus (Institute of Art History UJ) and Dr E. Gawron (IJ UJ) – Centre head. Since 2012 Dr. Anna Jakimyszyn (IJ UJ) has also been on the Council.

Initially the Centre for the Study on the History and Culture of Krakow Jews operated from a building on Batory Street. In the spring of 2010 it was moved to a more suitable premises – Kazimierzowski Collegium on Józef Street, 19 in Cracow's Kazimierz – the former Jewish district.

Activites

The Centre's work started with the realisation of academic and general projects. Amongst the most important was a calendar project charting the history of Jews in Cracow and its subsequent stage – the preparation of a comprehensive history of the local Jewish population.

Within its first year of activities the Centre had organised lectures and meetings, as well as co-organising two conferences: *Synagoga Tempel* [The Tempel Synagogue] and *środowisko krakowskich Żydów postępowych* [The Environment of Reform Jews in Cracow], an academic symposium organised to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Szymon Dankowicz (10th of May 2010, at the Tempel Synagogue, in conjunction with the Jagiellonian University's Department of Jewish Studies and the Cracow Jewish Community and the Centre for Jewish Society in Cracow) and a conference for the general public on the life, literary and artistic work of Mordechaj Gebirtig (14th March 2010 at the Galicia Jewish Museum; in cooperation with the Association of Cracovians in Israel).

In subsequent years the Centre co-organised the academic symposium *Pomoc Żydom i żydowski ruch oporu w okupowanym Krakowie* [Help for Jews and the Jewish resistance movement in occupied Cracow] (13th of April 2012) with the Cracow Municipal Museum of History, as well as cooperating with the organisers in the preparation of the academic conference *Jehoshua Ozjasz Thon (1870–1936) – His Life, Thought and Activities* (3–4 October 2012).

In addition the Centre has successfully begun the process of gathering and digitising the available historical materials on the history of Cracow's Jews. Amongst the acquired collections are the photograph and document collection of the Jerzmanowski family, in particular that of Jan Jerzmanowski the lawyer (originally: Oskar Klemberger); a collection of post-war photographs of the Jewish Social-Cultural Society in Poland, Cracow Branch and the Youth Circle of the organisation; materials on those Jews saved in Cracow and the region (interviews); pre-Second World War publications on the Zionist movement in Cracow (including *Diwrej Akiba*, *Hanoar*); a unique book of burials at the Jewish Cemetery in the Podgórze district; small collections of photographs and family documents of Jews from Cracow now living in Israel (including those of Moshe Kerber, Prof. Eliezer Shafrir); film materials from the studio of the director Menachem Daum (three one off interviews with Orthodox Cracow Jews living in the United States of America) as well as of the Association of Cracovians in Israel (material on M. Gebirtig).

The archive materials are kept at the Centre primarily in digital form, while the book collections will become a separate part of the library at the Institute of Jewish Studies. The Centre also collects photographic, film, printed

and occasional materials documenting the present-day life of Jews in Cracow. Since June 2010 the Centre has been also involved in, following consultations with the Jewish Community in Cracow, work on a joint Internet site project on the history of Cracow Jews. This will be available in three languages (Polish, English and Hebrew) designed to provide information on the subject of the history and contemporary Jewish life of Cracow. This project, now ongoing for several years, has been possible thanks to the financial support of the Taube Foundation. It is still in development and can be accessed at: www.jewish.krakow.pl (The Jews in Kraków).

Within the framework of hitherto activities the Centre's cooperation has involved working with the Jewish Community in Cracow, the Association of Cracovians in Israel, The Jewish Community Centre in Cracow (JCC Krakow), the Galicia Jewish Museum, the Cracow Municipal Museum of History, the E. Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, as well as with the Yad Vashem (institute and archive, Jerusalem, Israel) and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC.

The annually increasing number of tourists who visit the district of Kazimierz as well as sites connected with Cracow's Jewish heritage has resulted in a growing need for qualified guides who are able to answer the array of questions posed by the visitors and able to explain the significance of the places visited. Therefore the Centre has also engaged in the educating of city guides in the history and culture of Cracow Jews both during university lectures and externally organised courses, for example through the Galicia Jewish Museum.

The Centre tries hard to involve Jagiellonian University undergraduates and Ph.D. students, on internship and volunteer terms, in the projects it organises; first and foremost those studying at the Institute of Jewish Studies and more broadly from the Faculty of History. Interns work on the creation of databases and the time line, as well as participating in the Centre's external projects. One of these was the remembrance of anniversaries connected with the Cracow ghetto. In March 2011 students took part in an undertaking to prepare and stick symbolic obituaries on houses in the centre of Cracow and the Kazimierz district from where Jews were evicted to the ghetto in the Podgórze district.

In cooperation with the Galicia Jewish Museum and the Aleksandrowicz family from Israel, the Centre has also organised the exhibition of Ze'v Aleksandrowicz's pre-war photographs *Polska i Palestyna – dwie ziemie i dwa nieba. Żydzi krakowscy w obiektywie Ze'eva Aleksandrowicza* [Poland and Palestine – two earths and two heavens. Cracow Jews through the lens of Ze'v Aleksandrowicz]. This was an exhibition of pre-war photos of Cracow and of Palestine taken by this well-known Cracow photographer. Among other

things, the exhibition showed the fates of the photos and several graduates of the Jagiellonian University, who emigrated to Palestine during the inter-war years. The exhibition was accompanied by a bilingual (Polish-English) album published in 2012 by the Galicia Jewish Museum. At present the collection of photographs constitutes the basis for an educational project for Cracow secondary schools, which follow in the footsteps of the Aleksandrowicz family in Cracow and Israel. Another event that went together with the exhibition was the public debate: *Czy syjonizm był popularny wśród Żydów w przedwojennym Krakowie?* [Was Zionism popular amongst Jews in pre-war Cracow?] (11th June 2012).

As part of its educational activities the Centre has hosted foreign grant holders from the United States of America (on the Fulbright Programme: Joanna Śliwa, Clark University; Dara Bramson, Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York) and Japan (Aya Saeki). The Centre has been used many times for the consulting of individual research projects, archive research in Poland, novels on Jewish subject matter set in Cracow, and also screenplays in which elements of the history of Cracow's Jews are to be found.

Thanks to the functioning of the Centre it has been possible to act as a contact between individuals searching for archive materials in Cracow and institutions possessing archive collections and those involved in the assembly of materials on the history of Cracow's Jews.

Promotion of Heritage

One of the aims of the Centre is the promotion of the history and heritage of Cracow Jews, which is why during the course of its functioning the Centre has cooperated with the media on Jewish related topics many times. Both the Centre's head, Dr. E. Gawron, as equally members of the Academic Council have taken part in radio broadcasts (Radio Kraków, BBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). In November 2009 the radio programme *Za naszą i Waszą wolność* [For your freedom and ours] (Radio Kraków), that showed the part played by Cracow Jews in the fight for an independent Poland, was broadcast. In November 2010 another radio programme featuring a Centre representative dealt with the subject of saving Jews from Cracow and the surrounding area (Radio Kraków). This subject was to return to the air in January 2011 and April 2012. In both cases the Centre was represented by Dr. E. Gawron. Another topic for radio discussion in 2011–2012 was the popularity of the Zionist movement amongst Cracow Jews (broadcast on Poland's Radio 2). Another debate in which the Centre was represented took

place in the local media in 2013 and dealt with the use of the land of the former German concentration camp at Płaszów, which is also the location of two pre-war Jewish cemeteries levelled by the Germans.

Since 2010 talks have been underway on the subject of creating a museum in Cracow devoted to the many centuries of the history and culture of Cracow's Jews. The most active here has been the Cracow Municipal Museum of History in its endeavours, particularly the section based at the Old Synagogue, which was to have been the base for the project's development. Representatives of the Cracow Municipal Museum of History and staff of the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Jewish Studies (those on the Academic Council Dr. hab. M. Galas, Dr. hab. A. Kaźmierczyk, Dr. hab. Stefan Gąsiorowski and Dr. A. Jakimyszyn as well as Dr. E. Gawron – the Centre's head) have talked many times about the idea of creating a museum on Cracow's Jews

The cooperation enjoyed with secondary school pupils, both those from Cracow and outside, has been extremely interesting and fruitful. In November 2011, the Centre worked with a group of teachers and pupils from the 10th Grammar School in Cracow within the framework of the project *Żydzi w Krakowie* [Jews in Cracow]. The pupils worked on, and later presented at school, a series of elements of the former and contemporary daily life of local Jews. The Centre organised a series of lectures and study visits for the pupils outside Cracow.

Resulting from the Centre's location and first and foremost the aims it was created for, it has been extremely natural for it to join in with already existing local initiatives – like for instance the Józef Street Festival (June 2011) or the Jewish Culture Festival (since 2012).

The promotional and consultation work of the Centre extends beyond the borders of its immediate environs. Already in December 2010 the Centre helped in the preparations for the London conference (12th–13th of December 2010) promoting the 23rd volume of the publishing house: 'POLIN. Studies in Polish Jewry' – 'Jews in Kraków' (ed. M. Galas, A. Polonsky). During this event, lectures were also given by Dr. hab. M. Galas and Dr. E. Gawron, devoted to selected aspects of the history of Cracow's Jews.

The Centre was represented by the same parties at the special event promoting the history of Cracow's Jews – *Jews in Kraków. Then and Now* – at the Polish Embassy in Washington (17th of November 2011). Both events generated a lot of interest.

Cooperation with the Jewish Community

The Centre has equally attempted to generate funding to support its academic endeavours and book publishing. For example, the Jewish Community in Cracow partly financed the publication of Noema Bażanowska's book on Jewish children's homes in post-war Poland, concentrating in particular on the Jewish Children's Home in Cracow. The publication *To był mój dom. Żydowski Dom Dziecka w Krakowie w latach 1945–1957* [That was my home. The Jewish Children's Home in Cracow 1945–1957] appeared in 2012 in the print of the *Księgarnia Akademicka* publishing house.

The Centre has organised or jointly organised at least several events for the Jewish community, both locally and abroad. Already at the beginning of its activities, in July 2010, when the informal congress of members of the Cracow Youth Circle of TSKŻ was organised in Cracow – a meeting under the slogan of 'Together again' – the Centre helped in factual matters and devised a commemorative booklet to mark the occasion. Thanks to its involvement, the head of the Centre was able to participate in the event and make contact with many of Cracow's Jews who were forced to leave Poland as a result of the events of 1967–1968. The contacts allowed interaction and even the establishment of links between distant relatives, spinoffs of which were to be the presentation to the Centre and the subsequent institutional promotion of materials relating to the eminent Jewish literary critic of Cracow origin, Stanisław Lacek.

Thanks to the support of the Jewish Community in Cracow and the Association of Cracovians in Israel, as well as cooperation with the E. Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, it was possible to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the destruction of the Cracow ghetto. This was done through the publication of a reprint of the book *W 3-cią rocznicę Zagłady Ghetta w Krakowie* [On the third anniversary of the Annihilation of the Ghetto in Cracow] (Ośrodek i Wydawnictwo Austeria, Kraków 2013). This publication is of importance in two ways – it is a collection of texts documenting the Holocaust in Cracow as well as being a testimony to those saved. The original was printed by the Provincial Jewish Historical Commission in Cracow, with the authors including Cracow Jews who had survived World War II.

The Centre has become a repository for individual and family stories, collections of photographs and documents. These are digitalised and made available to Cracow Jews around the world. One forum for this, for example, is at genealogical conferences and in July 2012, a representative of the Centre took part in the 32nd IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy. It was thanks to cooperation with the Polish Institute in Paris that it became possible to put on a presentation about the Centre and the subject of *Jewish Families from Kraków*.

The Centre is not merely here to describe and promote history, it equally has as its task the raising of awareness amongst a broad group of recipients that the Jewish legacy in Cracow is still current and alive. Hence the numerous presentations explaining this heritage, often in distant places (Jerusalem, New York or San Francisco), for varied groups and individuals (for example, groups of educators from Israel, teachers and leaders assembled within the Centrop Organisation programme, or equally groups of German rabbis). There is no absence of special challenges within the Centre's history: an example being the preparation of the *Historia Żydów w Krakowie w XX wieku* [History of Jews in Cracow in the 20th century] for the members of the Israeli rock group Ramzeilech (the meeting with staff was at the request and in conjunction with the Jagiellonian University's Student Self Government body and the Student Academic Circle of the Institute of Jewish Studies).

Jointly with the Jewish Community Centre in Cracow (JCC Kraków) the Centre has organised a series of lectures and meetings for the Cracow public, though these have also been directed towards foreign students and other organised groups such as the participants of the conference *Arabska Wiosna* [Arab Spring] (in December 2011). Also in conjunction with the JCC Kraków, a cyclical series of lectures were organised during the Festival of Jewish Culture. One of the last (2013) was devoted to Cracow rabbis and presented the profiles, texts and views of the most important spiritual leaders of Cracow's Jews in English.

A special honour was the invitation for the Centre's head, Dr. E. Gawron, to meet the American Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and to personally show her round a part of the exhibits at the Schindler Factory Museum, where the fate of Cracow's Jews during the Second World War is on display. The invitation for the Centre to cooperate on the *Wybitni krakowianie* [Eminent Cracovians] project, organised and coordinated by the office of the Mayor of Cracow, was also a mark of distinction. Recognition of the Centre's work was also apparent in it being entrusted to organise and conduct (Dr. E. Gawron) one of the sessions at the 2nd Congress of Foreign Researchers of Polish History, held in Cracow 12th–15th of September 2012). This session was devoted to the history of Polish Jews. All of these events have shown that the history of Polish Jews, and in particular those of Cracow, is perceived and appreciated as an integral part of Polish history.

The heritage of Cracow's Jews arouses huge interest amongst the inhabitants of Małopolska, Poland and the world. The rich history of Cracow's Jewish

community both within the context of the religious activity of modern times, as equally in the twentieth-century socio-cultural sphere means that there is a constant need for education as well as further research. The more actively we become acquainted with the past and observe the present, the more we will want to know and understand. The Centre for the Study on the History and Culture of Krakow Jews attempts to combine several functions, the aims of which are to acquaint oneself with the heritage of Cracow's Jews and to preserve this legacy for future generations, regardless of their provenance.